

3.5 Summary of Surface Passenger Breakout Session

***Conference on Updating the Louisiana Statewide Transportation Plan
July 31 – August 1, 2000
New Orleans Marriott***

This document summarizes the items discussed during the Surface Intercity Passenger Breakout Session held on July 31 and August 1, 2000. This Breakout Session, which was one of six sessions held for the various transportation modes, served as an important component of the first *Conference on Updating the Louisiana Statewide Transportation Plan* held at the New Orleans Marriott Hotel.

The primary purpose of this Breakout Session was to 1) review and validate the surface passenger and intermodal elements included in the 1996 *Louisiana Statewide Intermodal Transportation Plan (SITP)* and related benchmarks included in *Louisiana: Vision 2020*, and 2) identify new or additional strategic issues for consideration in the Plan Update. The related *SITP* and *Vision 2020* items are attached.

A total of 12 persons attended the Breakout Sessions, which included representatives of the Louisiana Public Transit Association, the Louisiana Association of Railroad Passengers, the Monroe Chamber of Commerce, the Sierra Club, the New Orleans Aviation Board, LDOTD, and other public and private sector stakeholders.

James Guilbeau, representing the Sierra Club, suggested that we define “Surface Passenger Transportation” at the outset of these sessions “as any system moving people from point A to point B; i.e. bus, paratransit, and rail. It’s not just rail!”

Participants clearly confirmed their support for inclusion of the related 1996 *SITP* elements in the Plan Update, with suggested revisions or additions. This Breakout Session addressed all 5 of the *SITP* elements dealing with Surface Passenger Transportation, 3 Freight Rail elements, and 12 of the Intermodal related elements contained in the 1996 *SITP*, as well as several infrastructure benchmarks included in *Vision 2020*. No changes were suggested for the *SITP* modal and intermodal elements or the *Vision 2020* benchmarks, however several of the elements have been completed and do not need to be addressed in the Plan Update. Important items discussed are the following:

S-1 Create a Statewide Surface Transportation Authority / Entity

This element needs to be viewed in context to several existing entities that currently provide an organizational format for addressing surface passenger initiatives. The Southern Rapid Rail Transit Commission, representing the states of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, has been working for many years on the creation of a high-speed rail corridor serving the Gulf Coast. The SRRTC however is a tri-partite entity and therefore could not address the needs of Louisiana as a distinct state. Similarly, the

Louisiana High Speed Rail Authority has been formed by the Legislature, but this Authority has been dormant for a number of years. Therefore, the proposed Statewide Surface Passenger Authority can either be created by revising the existing High Speed Rail Authority or, if necessary, be formed as a new Authority, while simultaneously dissolving the former High Speed Rail Authority.

Darrel Saizan, representing the New Orleans Aviation Board, commented that the High-Speed Rail project should be differentiated from the proposed Maglev deployment project and the New Orleans' regional Light Rail project currently under study.

All in attendance indicated that for a truly statewide surface intercity passenger system to be supported by the Legislature, funded, and developed it must connect the populated centers of Louisiana (Shreveport to New Orleans), work in conjunction with Amtrak (enhance service levels on the Crescent split serving northern Louisiana), and truly address the mobility needs of the State. The New Orleans / Baton Rouge commuter rail system was deemed politically infeasible. It was suggested that we look at both the recent initiatives undertaken by North Carolina and Georgia.

It was suggested that the Authority be viewed in two different forms: 1) as a stand alone Authority; 2) as an adjunct to LDOTD. In either case, models from other states should be used. Texas has a stand alone Commission while North Carolina is principally staffed internally within their DOT. Given the current situation with the staffing at LDOTD (10% proposed cuts) the internal departmental option may not be feasible. Finally, LDOTD currently does not have a financial mechanism in place that would be necessary for this Authority to conduct its business if it were part of LDOTD.

In summary, the attendees strongly supported *SITP* element S-1 and noted that in order for it to succeed, the proposed legislation needs to be reviewed / revised by LDOTD legal personnel, a legislative sponsor (champion) needs to be identified, and various support materials developed (*SITP* Element S-2) to demonstrate its viability; i.e. a statewide intercity surface passenger plan including cost-benefit analysis. A key to moving this element forward is to create support from as broad a spectrum of the state's populace as possible.

- Draft legislation has been prepared and submitted to LDOTD for review.

S-2 Prepare a Statewide Public Transportation Plan.

This element calls for the development of a Statewide Surface Intercity Passenger Plan. Recently LDOTD issued the Statewide Coordination Opportunity Plan (SCOP) that addressed the rural population's mobility needs and demands and created strategies for both service coordination and implementation. Ms. Cranshaw, of LDOTD, made a brief presentation on this project. "We determined what was out there and deemed the service delivery system very fragmented and uncoordinated. We need a new system that is both coordinated and simplified. That is what SCOP is all about."

- Phase 1 of the State Passenger Rail Plan has also been completed (Baton Rouge / New Orleans route).
- The development of a Statewide Surface Intercity Passenger Plan is included in the STP Scope of Work.

S-3 Include Urban Transit Initiatives in Statewide Transportation Planning

This element called for the inclusion of urban transit initiatives in planning at LDOTD.

- This concept has been fully embraced by LDOTD. This element is complete. It does not need to be addressed in the upcoming Statewide Transportation Plan.

S-4 Establish a Surface Passenger Development Fund.

This element called for a dedicated revenue source for the development of a variety of surface passenger transportation systems and services.

- *SITP* Elements S-1 and S-2 must be completed before Element S-4 is created. Legislative / voter education is crucial to the successful implementation of Element S-4. One suggestion was for a \$.01 sales tax dedicated to public transportation (similar to TIMED program).

S-5 Establish a Safety / Inspection Program for Fixed Guideway Mass Transportation Systems.

This element called for a safety / inspection program for streetcar systems operating in New Orleans. This was mandated by FTA requirements.

- In 1999, LDOTD contracted with a private consultant to perform this program in conjunction with the New Orleans Regional Transit Authority. The final report was audited by FTA officials in Spring 2000 and was found to be in compliance. This element is complete and does not have to be addressed in the Statewide Transportation Plan.

Related Rail Freight and Intermodal *SITP* Elements Summary

<i>SITP</i> Element	Status	Issues Relative to STP Update
R-1	Awaiting LDOTD decision	Strongly support
R-3	Awaiting LDOTD decision	Strongly support
R-6	Study under development	TAC should include Amtrak Representative
I-1	Complete	Relates to R-1, R-3, S-1, S-2

S/ITP Element	Status	Issues Relative to STP Update
I-2	Prototype website prepared	Strongly support PR campaign
I-3	Increased funding achieved	Identify source of funds
I-4	Awaits completion of S-2	Revisit LDOTD selection policy for enhancement funds
I-5	Complete	No further action required
I-6	Complete	Clarify status of DED EDAP \$
I-7	Purchase pending of KCS ROW	Clarify title problems / solutions
I-8	Complete	Suggest increased funding
I-9	Complete	No further action required
I-11	LDOTD action required	Add connectors to State System
I-12	Development plan pending	Monitor project / process
I-13	Funding gap exists	Pursue \$12M funding gap

Other Important Items Discussed

A Shreveport / New Orleans passenger rail system was strongly supported. Also, northern Louisiana rail station development (temporary and permanent) was seen as an immediate need relative to the proposed new Amtrak Crescent split being implemented later this year. These stations should be linked with Greyhound bus service, as well as local transit services.

It was suggested that in the Statewide Transportation Plan Update the following be investigated:

- the role of regional HOV use between New Orleans and Baton Rouge;
- a busway on the Almonaster bridge;
- rapid bus utilization; and
- New Orleans commuter rail initiatives should include Slidell to New Orleans, River Parishes to the New Orleans CBD, and connections to the North Shore.

From a strategic perspective, the Breakout Session attendees suggested that Louisiana's lack of intra-state regional air service lends support to a state-sponsored intercity passenger transportation system (both rail and bus). This system should augment existing Amtrak and bus systems / services.

Three additional items of discussion included:

- 1) The importance of developing and utilizing quantitative criteria/methodology for evaluating the impacts and needs for surface intercity passenger transportation improvements;
- 2) The need to focus on alternative and additional financing/funding sources required to implement needed surface passenger intercity transportation improvements within the 30-year horizon period; and
- 3) The need to conduct a coordinated and comprehensive educational program for both the legislature and the general public (similar to a PAC oriented political campaign) to sell this important (surface intercity passenger transportation) concept to the voters and their elected officials at all levels of government (local, state, national).

The evaluation criteria/methodology established for the Plan Update should recognize the differences in urban versus rural surface passenger characteristics and needs, include intermodal related criteria, and recognize the interrelationships of projects (i.e. do not evaluate projects individually). It was also noted that the Plan Update will include development of a Statewide Travel Demand Model, which will serve as a useful tool in identifying and evaluating transportation improvement needs and associated impacts.

It was recommended that the Plan Update include a comprehensive analysis of alternative financing/funding scenarios. It was also suggested that we establish a Finance Advisory Council for addressing this critical issue.

New Plan Elements

The following element was not addressed in 1996 *SITP* and identified as important items that should be addressed in the Plan Update:

- An active and on-going multi-modal educational – marketing program aimed at both the elected officials and the general citizens needs to be aggressively pursued. This is the number 1 priority for the State.